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Report on Barbie fails to deal with more general issues

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The Justice Department's report titled "Klaus Barbie and the United States government" by Allan Ryan Jr., outgoing director of the Department's Office of Special Investigations (OSI), is in certain aspects a historic and remarkable document.

Yet, a close study of the 216-page report raises some disturbing questions in that it conspicuously fails to address itself to the issue, even after nearly 40 years of denial and cover-up, that Nazi war criminals and collaborators had found refuge—and in numerous, provable instances, employment by government agencies—in this country.

The report's historic value comes from the fact that it is the first official admission by the U.S. government that it had used and protected from prosecution by an ally—in this case, France—a wanted, notorious war criminal, Klaus Barbie, executioner of French Jews and resistance movement heroes during World War II.

The report's documentation consists of nearly 600 declassified Army, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and State Department intelligence materials covering the period 1947-1951 when the U.S. Army's Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) in Europe knowingly used and protected Barbie. That the American government released such a body of evidence—which is powerfully replete with self-damning, self-damaging revelations—ultimately redounds to the credit of both Ryan and the Justice Department.

When Ryan said at a press conference recently that "justice delayed is justice denied" is a basic democratic principle, he was invoking the best in American democracy and in himself as a thorough-going law enforcement professional.

Of concern, therefore, are the broader, general premises which undergird the report rather than the more than a few factual and historic errors contained in it.

Barbie was sought out and recruited because it was believed that he could provide U.S. intelligence agencies with information about Soviet activity in Europe in the struggle against Soviet

communism. But from a practical view, Barbie provided no intelligence of worth about Soviet activity. His role in France was to hunt down, torture, and exterminate the resistance movement and Jews. These were the only "communists" about which Barbie was knowledgeable.

The Ryan report glides over this point of the qualitative level of the purported "value" which the CIC found in a Barbie. The "defectors" from the Soviet zone of occupied Germany and elsewhere in Eastern Europe—who were also sought out and recruited like Barbie—were actually large numbers of fascist collaborators: Iron Guardists from Rumania, Thunder Cross vigilantes from Latvia, Ukrainian pogromists of the proscribed Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) barred from the benefits of the International Refugees Organization (IRO) immediately after World War II, and from other similar organizations who fled westward.

The report itself shows that lists compiled as early as the summer of 1945 counted Barbie among the wanted war criminals. There was CROWCASS (Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects), an American listing of wanted Nazis, the United Nations War Crimes Commission, and other lists. More importantly, the individual listings of the Grand Alliance (Holland, Belgium and the Soviet Union) also identified Barbie as a war criminal.

An analysis of the report's text shows that some 46 per cent of its data base was given to the Justice Department by the French. The single most inclusive documentation on Barbie in Lyon where he was gestapo chief, originated with the French resistance. Yet, the Ryan report does not contain a single reference to this source which is enormously rich and precise in its detail.

Compounding an omission

Moreover, to compound this basic omission, the report totally fails to put the role of Barbie, the gestapo and Lyon within the German occupation of France and the treasonous Vichy government with which the U.S. maintained diplomatic contact and

gave sympathetic support during the larger part of Barbie's murderous activities in Lyon.

It is important to recall that Lyon was under the Vichy government which continued to administer southern France after the Nazis occupied the north until early 1942 when the Nazis installed their own military-political apparatus in the south as well. Barbie was sent to Lyon, which was the acknowledged capital of the resistance movement, in 1942 and for the next two years he was responsible for the execution of some 4,000 people and the deportation of 7,000 more, most of whom never returned from the death camps in Eastern Europe.

It is small wonder, therefore, that the intelligence analysis of Barbie's role and the now-admitted post-war American utilization of Barbie fails to consider a crucial pattern in the fabric of history. Were Barbie's post-war activities a continuation by other means to exterminate the remnants of the French resistance movement?

Another, explosively vital documentation in the Ryan report is the relationship between the CIC and one Padre (actually Monsignor) Krunoslav Dragonovich who is described in the report as the "operator" of a "sort of underground railroad, dubbed (by the CIC) a 'rat line' that ran from Austria to Italy where it relied on a Croatian priest (Dragonovich)...attached to a seminary in Rome where Croatian youths studied for the priesthood."

Additionally, the report notes that "Dragonovich used this base to operate an escape service for Croatian nationalists fleeing from the Yugoslav authorities." Moreover, the CIC itself, the report says, "was under no illusions" about the priest: "Dragonovich is known and recorded as a fascist, war criminal, etc." (the CIC stated in a top secret message) and his contacts with South American diplomats of a similar (fascist) class are not approved by U.S. State Department officials...."

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